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Viewing cable 08MOSCOW2837, RABBIS SHAYEVICH AND GOLDSCHMIDT CAUTIOUSLY

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Discussing cables

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| Reference ID | Created | Released | Classification | Origin |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 08MOSCOW2837 | 2008-09-22 15:14 | 2011-08-30 01:44 | CONFIDENTIAL | Embassy Moscow |

Appears in these articles:

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2018
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SUBJECT: RABBIS SHAYEVICH AND GOLDSCHMIDT CAUTIOUSLY
OPTIMISTIC ABOUT RUSSIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

REF: MOSCOW 02696

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle for reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador met separately with xxxxx during the week of September 15. xxxxx probed for potential U.S. sanctions against investors in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and flagged concern

over Iran's nuclear program. Both xxxxx agreed that manifestations of anti-Semitism in Russia had fallen in recent years, but xxxxx attributed Putin's relatively pro-Jewish stance to his need to not appear anti-Semitic during his campaign against the oligarchs. Regarding the Jewish community, xxxxx praised the positive effects of Russia's explosion of wealth, while xxxxx linked economic expansion to a negative shift in the occupational and educational interests of the Russian Jewry. Both xxxxx added that immigration from Israel to Russia vastly exceeded Russian emigration to Israel, but xxxxx noted the reduced Israeli financial support because of the falling dollar. End Summary.

Anti-Semitism: Muted Compared to Soviet Era

¶ 12. (C) xxxxx told the Ambassador on September 16 that anti-Semitism in Russia has declined in recent years, and that Russian Jews faced fewer problems today than in Soviet times. xxxxx noted that the chance for a reversal of fortune for Russian Jews existed, characterizing Russia as a country of extremes. He drew an analogy to Gorbachev's prohibition of alcohol and the Russian penchant to drink excessively as a manifestation of these extremes. xxxxx more cautiously agreed that anti-Semitism was not widespread -- especially in Russia's political sphere -- as it had been in past years. However, he attributed this change, in part, to Putin's conscious desire to appear unbiased in his campaign against Russia's predominately Jewish oligarchs. xxxxx added that economic prosperity brought tolerance and reduced the need for scapegoats, noting that Russia's newfound wealth softened a principal grievance of Russian society. He also applauded the Russian government's efforts to punish those that committed racially-motivated crimes, saying that the 16-year imprisonment of Aleksandr Koptsov for stabbing 11 people in a Moscow synagogue in 2006 left an indelible impression on society. xxxxx also explained the role of numerous Jewish organizations in Russia and Eastern Europe, referred specifically to the increasing prominence of the Russian Jewish community in Germany, and he said that Russian Jews would eventually assume leadership of the Jewish community there.

Political Jockeying, Georgia, Iran

¶ 13. (C) xxxxx admitted that he did not have the same level of contact with the Kremlin as xxxxx, Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar (Note: Along with Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar, xxxxx Calling himself an old man, he claimed to have little interest in attending official functions, and he appreciated the fact that he was no longer "bothered" by the ruling elite. He singled out the Kremlin's disapproval of Russian oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky, xxxxx as the chief reason for his past and current political "suffering."

¶ 14. (C) xxxxx in his meeting, probed for information about potential U.S. crackdowns against any oligarchs for investing in South Ossetia or Abkhazia, curious about the future funding for the Jewish community. He specifically mentioned diamond magnate Lev Leviev's rumored financial problems stemming from some bad investments, and added that the current financial crisis damaged the Russian elite. xxxxx expressed concern over Iran, noting to his recent travel to Brussels for the European Jewish Congress (EJC) annual meeting, chaired by EJC President and Russian billionaire Vyacheslav Moshe Kantor. Kantor called for strong, legal, multilateral measures against Iran for their development of a nuclear weapons program in a May 2008 press conference, then subsequently traveled to Tehran for meetings, according to xxxxx He spoke about Kantor's work on Holocaust issues, specifically drawing on Kantor's work with the government of Poland on the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, as well as his cooperation with the government of Ukraine in 2006 on remembering the 65th

anniversary of the executions at Babi Yar. xxxxx estimated that Kantor had dedicated approximately 30-40 million dollars to his work in Eastern Europe, but did not specifically say if Kantor drew on his own funds for this purpose.

Jewish Community Relations

¶ 15. (C) While xxxxx gave a mixed assessment on the future of Russia's Jewish community, xxxxx saw Russia's economic growth as positive for the Jewish middle class. While naming the Georgian and Azeri Jewish communities in Moscow as strong and calling the entire Jewish community more stable, xxxxx criticized the motivations of Russia's Jewish youth, saying they no longer strove for prestigious careers in science, teaching, or theology as in Soviet times. xxxxx placed importance on current youth projects, pointing to the need for a more robust Jewish upbringing in contemporary society considering that many young Jews pursued business careers. xxxxx on the other hand, saw Russia's newfound wealth as a positive factor for the Jewish community since it has enabled the formerly lower class citizens to reach a middle class status. Community members have earned the ability to buy cars and real estate, travel once a year, and even provide donations for community projects. He also relayed the fact that the Moscow Jewish community had taken control of its financial situation, no longer relying on help from abroad.

¶ 17. (C) While the number of Jews in Russia remained low, the community retained strong support. xxxxx could not give an exact number for Russia's Jewish population, estimating the community's number at 500,000 with only 1,500 Jews left in his birthplace of Birobidzhan, Jewish Autonomous District (Note: 2008 International Religious Freedom Report estimated Russia's Jewish population at 250,000). xxxxx blamed the decline of the Jewish Autonomous District on a lack of leadership. He tallied 112 Jewish communities in Russia and added that new synagogues had been built in Petrogorsk, Tomsk, Tula, and in the northern Caucasus. xxxxx told the Ambassador that the Congress of the Jewish Religious Organizations and Associations of Russia (KEROOR) had over 100 communities in Russia, predominantly based in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and the Golden Ring outside of Moscow. Those communities outside of these three regions typically depended on financial support from Moscow.

¶ 18. (C) xxxxx for a Jewish museum failed to bear fruit. While Lazar's Museum of Tolerance (reftel) received high-level support from Putin and Luzhkov, his past efforts to create a non-denominational Jewish museum never took off. xxxxx saw the Museum of Tolerance as a Chabad project, one that will present Lazar's perception of Jewish history and culture and confirmed that Leviev financed Lazar's project, along with Roman Abramovich.

Israel

¶ 19. (C) xxxxx indicated that Jewish immigration from Israel to Russia greatly exceeded that of emigration from Russia to Israel. xxxxx appeared impressed by the level of reverse immigration from Israel to Russia, saying that only approximately 1,000 Russians emigrated to Israel over the past year. xxxxx impressions, saying that approximately 2,000 Jews in the entire former Soviet Union moved to Israel in the past year. Both regarded the figures as the product of Russia's growing stability and wealth. Adding greater depth on Russian-Israeli relations, xxxxx blamed the falling dollar for the reduction of Israeli support to the Russian Jewish educational system. xxxxx lauded the recently signed visa-free travel agreement between Russia and Israel since it would mean less work for him, no longer needing to help his community members receive visas.

Beyrle